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Extended Essay

ENGLISH A HL

A Clockwork Orange

**In the novel A Clockwork Orange how are people differentiated from the society
and classified as an outsider?**

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Table of Contents

II. Table of Contents.....	i
III. Abstract.....	ii
IV. Introduction.....	Page 4
V. The Interaction between Alex and the Society.....	Page 5-7
VI. Analysing the Language and Its Effects.....	Page 7-9
VII. Reflection of Alex as a Product of the Title.....	Page 10
VIII. Conclusion and Message.....	Page 11
V. References and Bibliography.....	Page 12

Abstract

For this extended essay I will be examining *A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess with my research question as: “In the novel *A Clockwork Orange* how are people differentiated from the society and classified as an outsider?”. I will firstly provide a brief historical background of the book along with a short summary of the major events that take place and the main character.

Then, I will be taking a further look at the possible effects/impacts of the interaction between Alex and his environment on the development of his character and differentiation from the society. In this part, I will explore the Individual versus State theme present in the novel and further examine it from Alex’s point of view. Through doing this, I will also closely look at the language “nadsat” provided in the text and how this reflects Alex’s inner thoughts and affects the reader’s point of view about Alex.

Later on, I will be tackling on the importance of the title of the book and mainly the reflection of the character as a production of the title. I will be defining what is a “clockwork orange” and why the author has particularly chosen this title in accordance with Alex’s differentiation from the society throughout his life. While I make this analysis, I will also be using the information I found from my personal research of Anthony Burgess as a writer. I will be making certain links to the fears he had for the problems in his society and how these experiences were integrated into the world he created and through Alex.

Lastly, I will have the conclusion part of my Extended Essay where I will be examining the term of being an outsider in general and tackle the message Anthony Burgess is trying to convey.

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I. Introduction:

a) Historical Background and Short Summary

“Does God want goodness or the choice of goodness? Is a man who chooses to be bad perhaps in some way better than a man who has the good imposed upon him?”(47) The novel, “*A Clockwork Orange*” is a peculiar mixture of a dystopian world which seems improbable but also similar to the one we live in today. Written by Anthony Burgess, it depicts a world filled with ultra violence where normal citizens have to be wary of the violent youth culture present in their daily lives. The protagonist of the story, Alex, is a fifteen year old boy who depicts events in his every day life through the teenage slang called nadsat, which is a mixture of Russian and English. As Alex is the leader of his gang of teenage criminals including Dim, Pete and Georgie, he plays a central role in portraying the totalitarian State and environment around him throughout the novel. As the book was published in 1962 and carries Anthony Burgess’ outlook on his own surroundings, it focuses on the rapid way in which freedom of choice is being sacrificed for the public good. The main question the author is trying to present to the readers is whether evil chosen is superior to unchosen good, and does so successfully through the visualisation of Alex’s differentiation from the society and even his gang. The turning points of the book where this message is presented is included towards the end when Alex is forced to associate violence with pain in order to be presented as a successful victory for the state.

In the novel, the main character and the narrator is Alex, whose gang performs acts of ultra violence and immoral decisions towards the people of the community. Alex appears to be a typical teenager in the world created by Burgess, as youth violence is the most major problem the society is dealing with. The gang that Alex is a part of represents the part of the society that is feared by most, but also unable to be broken. In the world Anthony Burgess has created, this behaviour is more common as the state, along with the citizens have become too fearful and

desperate to do anything to recover the situation. The ultra violence evident in the book has become a part of everyone's lives, and the helpless and innocent are forced to suffer along with everyone else.

II. Effects of the Interaction between Alex and the Society on his Development:

a) Individual versus State

Throughout the novel, we see the world through Alex's experiences, along with his suffering and pain. This allows the readers to get insight information upon Alex and how he is forced to be deprived of his emotions and reason for life in the end. It also allows for the readers to understand the development of Alex's character along with his disconnection from the society. Ever since the beginning of the novel, Alex chooses, on purpose to perform acts which he knows is harmful to the inhabitants of the society: *"I see what is right and approve, but I do what is wrong."*(24) This could be considered as a representation of the rebellion he has towards the society as a whole, but its reasons are also located through the Individual versus State battle. In the novel, Alex is always on the run because of what his gang and he stand for in the eyes of the State and the society. Therefore, they are never fully accepted into the society because of the things they do, which is highly acceptable as they are a huge danger to anyone who passes by them. However, it is never emphasized by any of the characters that the reason for this rebellion is the limits put on self-expression and more importantly, the carelessness attitude of the state and the people towards self-identity. Even though Alex could have easily been a character who everyone despises for the terrible acts he does, readers often choose to emphasize with him in a way that is very peculiar. As can be seen in the novel, no matter how sinful Alex's actions may be, he is also one of the only characters in the entire novel who is able to stick with their character until the end. This shows the readers another part of Alex

which is usually hidden from everyone else, and allows us to emphasise with Alex in some cases. In a society where everything is dull and everyone keeps on thinking the same ideas, Alex is a threat as he has an original character in person. Nobody cares much about his opinion, and it's due to the anger fuelling inside of Alex that causes him to commit such crimes. Even Alex's clothes at the very beginning of the book shows a different side of Alex than other teenagers. His outer appearance and being the leader of the gang are just small details which factor into his own self thoughts: *"The four of us were dressed in the height of fashion..."*(4) This is one of the main reasons as to why Alex is differentiated from the society. His ideas and train of thought may be violent, but his personality is unlike any other, which is always seen as a threat to any government.

This certain interaction between Alex and the elite part of the society which can be seen as the doctors, make up an important part of the novel as it shows exactly how Alex is seen in the eyes of everyone surrounding him. To the scientists and doctors, along with the government, Alex is seen as a tool when captured: he is the perfect lab experiment. In this part of the novel it is clear to see that no part of the government cares for the destruction of Alex's personality and free-will, and for them this is a step that must be taken for the public good: *"He has no real choice, has he?...He ceases also to be a creature capable of moral choice."*(95) This conversation that takes place with Dr. Brodsky is the author's direct way of warning the readers of what he fears his world is becoming into: *"We are not concerned with motive, with higher ethics. We are concerned only with cutting down crime-".*(95) This attitude that the doctors carry shows exactly how Alex is being classified as an outsider. In the beginning, Alex is not even seen as a human being but more of a chance for doctors to bring a sense of comfort and trust to the society and put their faith in the government. Therefore, in order for this plan to be successful, Alex must first be seen and portrayed as a complete outsider and criminal, regained back into the society as a responsible citizen. However, the main part that is criticized

in the novel is that it is because of this labelling and categorizing that people like Alex have become so violent. For them, the violence that they display is a cry for their freedom which they see is being taken from everyone. Therefore, when the government not only differentiates them from society psychologically but also presents them to the media in that same way, that's when there is no longer any opportunity left for people like Alex to get their message across. This constant Individual vs. State battle within the society is portrayed through many parts of the novel and is mostly embodied through Alex's interaction with the doctors and scientist who try their experiment on him.

III. Analyzing the Language and Its Effects on How Alex is perceived

a) Nadsat Language

In the novel, the language displayed for Alex and his gang is an unusual one which can be seen through his conversations with members of the gang and even in his inner monologues: *"These grahzny sodding veshches that come out of my gulliver and my plott," I said, "that's what it is."*(64) In the description of these scenes and throughout the novel in general, the language displayed is called "nadsat" and is defined as a mixture of Russian influenced words. This language plays an important role throughout the novel, as it allows the author to describe situations which would normally be considered foul and violent to have more ambiguity and less clarity. By Burgess specifically making the language hard to understand, he is also keeping the readers away from the intensely brutal violence acts that Alex commits and instead allows the readers to try to decode the language. As readers, in order to understand Alex we must first identify with him and be able to understand his language. He makes the readers focus on the language provided rather than what is happening around us since the beginning, and this allows him to try to influence our way of thinking so that it is in favour of Alex. In addition, as was mentioned previously, after Alex is tortured into obedience and the rules of society and suffers

vehemently since he can neither find happiness nor a purpose in life, this situation allows for an atmosphere to be created in which the readers begin to have pity for Alex, and makes the character somewhat less of a villain and more of a human being.

These events shown in “A Clockwork Orange” leads the readers to think about the place that Alex holds in the eyes of society. He is someone who is feared by the public and the government at the beginning of the book, but no one ever stops and considers the reason behind his actions. This is one of the main reasons why at the end of the novel, Alex fails to be transformed into a true member of society and is only left with feelings of pain and agony. This also reflects the ideology of all societies which prefer people to be someone who people would classify as “normal” rather than to be “themselves”. Even though in the novel Alex is presented as a character who has an extreme personality and violence-promoting trait, Burgess makes every reader question to what extent can the actions of the doctors which tortured him into “normality” be justified as well?

It’s actually only about perception, and moreover how people are programmed to perceive things from only one point of view. These little things that make up our daily lives are what is actually a huge collection of habits which have been apparent in our cultures for hundreds of years, and they have passed as an unspoken law in every society. It’s almost as if silently, a hidden social contract has been regulated between the people of the society, and everyone has signed it with their name in blood. However, the thing about habits is that it’s not something which everyone does, but it’s mainly for the society. What this shows is that during the process of these habits becoming unwritten rules made to be performed by every individual, they also exclude a certain group of people from the society itself. No matter how unique we may think ourselves to be, we are all a product of the government, the media, and our surroundings. It’s only when we have managed to hold onto a fragment of our personalities can we be considered ourselves, and, unfortunately, “abnormal.” For the society, there is no

importance of identity, because in a mechanic perspective it can only slow down further progress and complicate basic situations. This is the main message which the author is trying to invoke upon the readers, which is that: Any person can only be considered themselves if they are not a complete reflection of the society's rules and regulations, and once they have managed to have this certain sense of identity, they will be forced outside of the society.

That's why the main character in the novel "A Clockwork Orange" is easy to sympathize with for the readers no matter how psychotic he is as a violent teenage criminal. He represents a part of everyone which they have kept hidden, locked away, from the eyes of the society. They are characters who might be seen as extreme, either with violence or indifference, but that's only because we cannot fully understand them. They are never portrayed as the "ideal members of society" in the novels, but the fact that they are both brave enough to completely display every aspect of their personalities without the fear of judgement, is not something that any of the other characters can display in their story lines. This is the real reason why they are differentiated from the society as well. As they have chosen the path to clearly express their ideas and emotions without the constant fear of judgement by other people, they are not considered as citizens of the society, or people who are trying to get a message across, but simply people who "must be dealt with."

IV. Reflection of Alex as a Product of the Title

a)What Clockwork Orange Means to the Context

Another significant part of the novel is the title of it as it reflects how Anthony Burgess sees the character Alex and once again reestablishes the term of being an outsider in the novel. As stated by Anthony Burgess, "If he can only perform good or only perform evil, then he is a clockwork orange - meaning that he has the appearance of an organism lovely with color and juice but is in fact only a clockwork toy to be wound up by God or the Devil." As can be seen from the quote, Burgess describes "a clockwork orange" as someone that has the exterior

appearance of being alive and organic, whereas on the inside, they are actually just like a robot-clock. Therefore, the title of the novel can be seen as an entire metaphor for the book and the state that Alex becomes in after his “treatment” by the doctors. In the end, Alex fails to become a clockwork orange, but the entire book is about his struggle to keep his self-identity and not to let his personality fall into the wrong hands and in the end only become a product of what the State wants to see him as. By using this title, Burgess is actually creating a social criticism as to how, as individuals, we are all clockwork oranges. On the outside, we believe we look like ourselves, like we are all different people with our own qualities that make us special, but in reality we are just a product of the environment surrounding us. We are all clockwork oranges in the sense that just like robots, we are programmed to feel certain emotions in given situations and act in a certain way that is deemed acceptable by everyone else. In a world of clockwork oranges, no matter how violent Alex is as a criminal, he is not a clockwork orange and is therefore, classified as an outsider. Anthony Burgess has intentionally chosen a character who creates ultra-violence around him wherever he goes and is seen by everyone as useless, dangerous and foolish in his actions, because what Burgess is trying to emphasize is that in despite of all these things, Alex is proud of who he is and always manages to remain himself.

V. Conclusion

a) The Message Burgess is Trying to Convey

Overall, there are various ways in which Alex is differentiated from the society. But as we can see, it is not only him who is being classified as an outsider but people just like him, who have not yet become “a clockwork orange” in the hands of the state. Even though Alex is a violent teenage criminal who steals, kills and fights with lots of people throughout the novel, it’s his integrity that he tries to fight for until the end. It is easy to classify people like Alex as outsiders, because they don’t fit inside the norms of the society and break the rules and

regulations that have been set for everyone. In the book, these people like Alex are constantly trying to be changed into someone who they are not because their entire existence could potentially cause a fault in the system the government and the society has set up for themselves. This is why in “A Clockwork Orange”, Anthony Burgess has tried to express the fate he sees for the future in his novel and through the character Alex. The main message that Burgess was trying to get across was that as can be extracted from the novel overall, as long as people immediately begin to label and categorize people in certain groups and classify them as outsiders without ever fully trying to understand their point of view and instead just try to change them like a clock, this dystopia is not so far ahead of us.

Word Count: 2819 words

Reference List

Burgess, Anthony. *A Clockwork Orange*. London, England: William Heinemann Ltd, 1962
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